

EXHIBIT 10

The ‘race whisperer’

A black activist convinced a neo-Nazi he’d save him from legal ruin. Then the real plan began.



Community activist James Stern at his home in Moreno Valley, Calif., earlier this year. Jeff Schoep, who joined the National Socialist Movement as a teenager and became its top leader, in Detroit. (Philip Cheung and Ali Lapetina for The Washington Post)

By **Katie Mettler** Oct. 30, 2019



James Stern knew he would need proof of this conversation later, so while his phone rang in late February he opened his Tape A Call app and hit record.

Stern, 55, billed himself as a community activist and minister, though his do-gooder credentials were accompanied by a history of criminal opportunism. He had spent much of his life in South Central L.A. trying to build connections between warring groups: the Bloods and the Crips, Korean grocers and their black neighbors, and now between himself — the son of an Ethiopian Jew — and the neo-Nazi on the other end of the phone.

For weeks, Stern had been courting Jeff Schoep, the longtime leader of the National Socialist Movement, in recorded phone calls.

His mission: to persuade Schoep, 45, to turn over the country's largest neo-Nazi group to a black man.

His promise: to get Schoep and his organization removed from a federal lawsuit alleging that he and two dozen other hate groups and their leaders had conspired to commit violence while organizing the 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville.



Left: Stern takes a meeting in Burbank, Calif. (Philip Cheung/For The Washington Post) **Right:** Schoep strikes a pose in Detroit. (Ali Lapetina/for The Washington Post)

But Schoep was still skeptical of the plan Stern had laid out for them, particularly signing a legal statement of facts that made them sound like adversaries instead of allies.

“Like, it’s basically like you’re trying to legally wrangle the organization from me,” said Schoep, who consented to being recorded on one call but not others.

Stern repeatedly assured him they were a team.

“You have to go with me. Go with my instincts,” Stern said. “We started this for a reason.”

A year into fighting the Charlottesville lawsuit, Schoep was broke and scared. The march had left one woman dead, dozens injured and the entire nation stunned, fueling an orchestrated campaign by anti-hate groups against organizations like the National Socialist Movement.

Some members had walked away. There was infighting. Schoep was worried the organization he had led since he was 21 — known worldwide for wearing Nazi stormtrooper uniforms, waving swastika flags and celebrating Adolf Hitler's birthday — would be blamed for the violence of others.

Just before Christmas in 2018, he'd found a confidant in Stern.



Schoep, second from left, stands beside Stern, second from right, at a Los Angeles radio station after their 2014 race summit. (Courtesy WRB public relations)

The two had met five years earlier, when Stern invited Schoep (pronounced “scoop”) to fly from his home in Michigan to California for an event called the National Conversation on

Race with black activists. They were an unlikely pair to lead that debate, but they shared a connection to one of the country's most prominent racists, Edgar Ray Killen, the Ku Klux Klan leader who orchestrated the "Mississippi Burning" killings of three civil rights workers in 1964.

Schoep knew Killen through the white supremacy movement.

Stern knew Killen from prison.

While inside for fraud, Stern lived in the same cell block as Killen. He said he persuaded the Klansman to sign over his life rights and legal power — an account disputed by Killen's family — by promising to get him a book and movie deal.

Years later, when Schoep shared his legal troubles, Stern saw an opportunity to win over another white supremacist — and earn a wave of [national media coverage](#).

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In 18 phone calls that Stern recorded between December 2018 and February 2019 and provided to The Post for this story, he offered Schoep a simple solution. Give the National Socialist Movement to me, Stern said, and I'll make the lawsuit disappear. If you change your mind, Stern assured him, I'll give it back to you.

So Schoep quietly wiped his officers' names from the group's incorporation paperwork and replaced them with the names of Stern and another black activist. Schoep signed a sworn,

notarized affidavit in January confirming it was he who made the changes. He fired his attorneys. He promised to keep it all a secret so his members couldn't object.

Now, on this Feb. 27 call, Stern was trying to convince Schoep to sign one last document, a statement of facts that spelled out why the neo-Nazi was giving his organization to a black man. "Do [sic] to the opposite of views of James Hart Stern on Nationalism I have turned both the Non-Profit 501(c)(3) tax exempt corporation, National socialist Movement and the domain website NSM88.org to him."

"I have sincere motives," the statement concluded, "and this was not just a stunt."

When Schoep hesitated, Stern pressed him.

"You're so used to having your way," Stern said. "This is a time when you have to do something you're totally uncomfortable with: Trust."

Stern asks Schoep to "trust" on Feb. 27, 2019



Listen to their conversation and read the text



Members of the National Socialist Movement, one of the country's largest neo-Nazi groups, burn a swastika after a 2018 rally in Draketown, Ga. (Spencer Platt/Getty Images)

‘A white civil rights group’

The protesters chanted “No home for Nazis!” as Stern’s National Conversation on Race got underway in February 2014 — the final week of Black History Month — at a black-owned jazz club in Beverly Hills called H.O.M.E.

A film crew hired to record the event captured the confrontation between the protesters and the small group of black activists and neo-Nazis who’d agreed to talk.

[\[Listen on Post Reports: Reporter Katie Mettler unpacks the complicated life of black activist James Stern and how he came to take control of the National Socialist Movement.\]](#)

“We shouldn’t allow these people to shut down what we’re trying to accomplish,” said Schoep, dressed in a black suit and steel-toed boots, a hammer of Thor pendant favored by white supremacists the only hint of his neo-Nazi identity.

“We’re not,” Stern said. “We’ve come too far.”

He had navigated tension like this before.

Stern was raised by a Christian mother and Ethiopian Jewish father. Sometimes they took him to church, he said, sometimes to synagogue.



Stern, the son of a Christian mother and Ethiopian Jewish father, delivers a sermon in April at Quinn African Methodist Episcopal Church in Moreno Valley, Calif. (Philip Cheung/For The Washington Post)

He became a Baptist preacher at 22, serving the projects of Watts, officiating funerals of shooting victims and organizing peace talks between rival gangs. When the beating of Rodney King and the fatal shooting of 15-year-old Latasha Harlins eventually lit Los Angeles on fire in 1992, he once again helped foster racial reconciliation.

For years, Stern advocated for economic opportunity in the projects and worked with ex-gang members to establish a nonprofit for kids, initiatives that were documented by local and national reporters, including half a dozen stories in the Los Angeles Times.

But he'd also been accused of overstating his credentials and being a relentless self-promoter. He had faced criminal charges, including a conviction of grand theft, forgery and conspiracy in connection with fraudulent student loans in 1988. He was sentenced to 44 months in state prison in that case.

His greatest fall came in 2004, after an organization he founded obtained a list of Mississippi barbers and hairstylists, then retrieved their financial information to print false bank statements.

Although he always maintained his innocence, Stern pleaded guilty to five counts of wire fraud and was sentenced to 25 years in prison with 10 suspended. He wound up at Parchman Farm in Mississippi, the state's oldest and most notorious prison, where Edgar Ray Killen was confined.



Edgar Ray Killen, center, was found guilty in 2005 in connection with the 1964 slayings of three civil rights workers. (Rogelio Soli/AP)

Set free by a hung jury the first time he was tried, Killen was 80 years old when he was finally convicted in 2005 for orchestrating the murders of James Chaney, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman in 1964. A judge sentenced the Klansman to 60 years in prison.

Using a wheelchair and recovering from a head injury, Killen was placed in Parchman's medical unit. In 2010, while suing the prison for exposing him to cigarette smoke that aggravated his glaucoma, so was Stern.

Stern said Killen called him "the n-word" almost daily. And yet, Stern recounted at his race summit, he still looked after the old man, defending Killen against other inmates, who once tried to put fecal matter in the Klansman's food and urine in his coffee.

"I did that because I'm a Christian, not because I like Edgar Ray Killen," Stern said.

"Because I saved him that day, he opened up, and he told me stuff that nobody would ever

believe.”

Dear James H. Stern:

While you are making your decision on joining our family as the first Negro, which I'm sure in my heart you will accept such a extraordinary Honor, let me inform you of some basic schools of thought you must embrace what the world calls segregation is just good common sense. The Negro and the white must draw a line between us. We must keep our blood line pure. A mix child has no where to go and those Communist Jews knew this in 1964 so they set out a CIA plan to hate and pull white race down. The Communist Jewish Bastards were training Black men to Rape at least one white woman a week! - we know it was Rape because no moral white woman would lay with a black man willingly. The white men in those days had a duty to protect these women and in most cases it was done with the Klan. The law time frame would have let ^{too} many unlearned Negroes get away with this. The justice was swift and the crime rate was the lowest in the nation. Mississippi had lowest crime rate of the 50 states. No keep from repeating this history you need to educate the average black of the importance to every one staying in their place (ask God what your place is) with the respect of boundaries come a good life for all. I am going to write you next time on the truth of how and why the Civil Rights movement really happened.

Your Friend, Brother, and Comrade

Edgar Ray Killen

Click to enlarge. One of dozens of letters that Stern says Killen wrote to him in prison. (Obtained by The Washington Post)

Eventually, he said, he persuaded Killen to write down his stories. When Stern was paroled in 2011, he left Parchman with dozens of letters addressed to him that he claimed were

penned by the Klansman. In them, Killen shared inside information about the KKK, wild conspiracy theories and racial musings.

“What the world calls segregation is just good common sence [sic],” one letter explains. “The negro and the white must draw a line between us. We must keep our blood line pure.”

Most critical of all was a sworn affidavit that sought to transfer Killen’s life rights, power of attorney and 40 acres of land to Stern. Killen did this, Stern claimed, so that the world could learn the truth about his life.

“He knew in his heart he’d never get out of prison,” Stern said at the race summit.

What he didn’t mention, though, was that Killen’s family and attorneys had adamantly denied it all, filing a lawsuit — eventually dismissed — that called Stern a thief and the sworn affidavit a “fake, a forgery, and a sham.”

Killen died in 2018 in Parchman at the age of 92. His widow, Betty Jo Killen, said in an interview that she wasn’t close to Stern.

“I just know of him, and my opinion is not good,” she said. “I don’t think he is trustworthy.”



Left: Klansmen pulled three civil rights workers from their station wagon in 1964 and fatally shot them before burning and abandoning the vehicle in a Mississippi swamp. (Associated Press) **Right:** The bodies of James Chaney, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman were found buried on a farm in Neshoba County, Miss., 44 days after the men disappeared. (Associated Press)

Stern hired two handwriting analysts to authenticate the Killen letters, and both concluded that Killen had penned them. At the race summit, Stern had the letters and authentication documents blown up on posters for all to see.

“My goal when I got out of prison was to do something for racial relationships,” Stern told the audience.

The National Socialist Movement members listened politely, revealing little about the version of themselves they usually displayed in public. During Schoep’s two decades as commander, the group had built a reputation for the kind of rhetoric that provoked violence.

Schoep speaks at rally in Newnan, Ga.

▶ 0:33

Schoep promotes the National Socialist Movement's white supremacist views in April 2018 in Newnan, Ga., at its annual rally celebrating Hitler's birthday. (Getty Images)

At rallies from Pennsylvania to Florida to Nebraska, Schoep told “mongrel horde” immigrants and “multiethnic scum” to “go home.” He preached that the “genocide” of

white people had to be stopped. When one of their marches in a black neighborhood in Toledo devolved into a riot in 2005, with most of the \$336,000 in damage carried out by counterprotesters, Schoep said that “the Negro beasts proved our point for us.”

But at the summit, Schoep and his cohorts insisted they were simply a white civil rights organization, no different from the NAACP.

Schoep said they rejected labels like “hate group,” despite their Hitler worship, and “racist,” though their whites-only rule was the definition of it. When someone asked if he believed white people were superior, Schoep said no, without mentioning his support for the creation of an all-white ethnostate.

Along the way, Stern paused for points of information, refereeing in a manner that made Schoep feel listened to and respected.

James Stern moderates 'National Conversation on Race' in L.A.

▶ 0:45

Black panelists and audience members challenge National Socialist Movement commander Jeff Schoep on his racist views in February 2014. (Courtesy of Jeff Schoep)

Stern challenged Schoep to remove the swastika from the group’s logo and made clear he disagreed with its ideology. But he also moderated fairly, Schoep thought, repeatedly clarifying what kind of group the National Socialist Movement insisted it was.

During a radio blitz after the summit, an interviewer called the group a neo-Nazi organization.

“No,” Schoep remembers Stern saying, “they’re a white civil rights group.”



National Socialist Movement members carry flags at the Unite the Right rally on Aug. 12, 2017, in Charlottesville, Va. (Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images)

‘Thor’s hammer’

Three years later, America watched as a crowd of angry white men with flaming tiki torches and polo shirts shouted “Jews will not replace us!”

The next day, Schoep joined them.

This time, as he and his group assembled in Charlottesville in August 2017, members had traded the suits they wore to the National Conversation on Race for black paramilitary fatigues and their calm demeanor for unleashed fury.

Much had changed since 2014. Barack Obama, who'd made history as the nation's first black president, had been replaced by Donald Trump, who'd won the White House questioning Obama's citizenship, attacking Mexican immigrants as drug dealers and rapists, and promising a border wall.

Trump's election thrilled far-right extremists, including a younger generation of white supremacists who called themselves the "alt-right" and rejected Klan hoods and Nazi regalia.

To keep up, Schoep had written an open letter to his members announcing a "slight re-branding" of the National Socialist Movement.

"The NSM will be ceasing public use of the swastika," Schoep said. The core values remained unchanged, Schoep wrote. This was just a "cosmetic overhaul."

But at the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, their new black NSM flag flew beside other groups' swastikas and Confederate banners as marchers hissed racist taunts.

Schoep had not only shown up for the event but also helped promote it to protest the city's plan to remove a statue of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee. What followed was the largest public display of white supremacy Schoep had ever witnessed.

As a kid, he'd loved history. Schoep chose library books about the Battle of the Bulge and read Hitler's "Mein Kampf" at 16. His grandfather had fought in World War II — for the Germans.

But he said his grandparents, German mother and American father openly opposed his decision to join the National Socialist Movement at 19 and become its commander at 21.



Schoep, center, and his members wear Nazi stormtrooper uniforms at a 2006 rally celebrating Adolf Hitler's birthday in Lansing, Mich. (Carlos Osorio/AP)

Yet he pushed on, establishing Skinhead and Women's divisions and reorganizing the Viking Youth Corps. He founded NSM88 Records, a label that released only white-power music (88 stands for Heil Hitler, "H" being the eighth letter of the alphabet) and purchased the neo-Nazi social media site New Saxon. He relied on merchandise sales to pay his bills.

Schoep faced accusations from disaffected members that he was using the movement for financial gain. Among the accusers was his second wife, Joanna Schoep. After they divorced in 2011, she gave an incendiary [interview to the Southern Poverty Law Center](#), which tracks hate groups. In it, she said Schoep married her knowing that she is a quarter Syrian and has a daughter who is half black.

"I know he's in it for the money," she said. "NSM is his only income. I feel like he doesn't care much about race because I have a lot of friends of different races and our neighbors were black. He seemed to get along with them all just fine. His anti-Semitism was a

different issue. He may not have cared about race, but he was definitely passionate about how awful he thought ‘the Jews’ were.”

Schoep has always maintained that his ex-wife’s assertions are untrue. He did not know about Joanna Schoep’s ethnicity before her interview, he said, and has never met her biracial daughter.



White supremacists confront counterprotesters at the 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville. (Evelyn Hockstein/For The Washington Post)

On the morning of Aug. 12, 2017, Schoep led a group of Unite the Right protesters to the Lee statue, according to the lawsuit. They clashed with counterprotesters, and Schoep acknowledged to a documentary filmmaker that he hit one.

“I knocked a guy out,” Schoep said on camera, holding up his fist. “Well he pushed me, so I hit him with Thor’s hammer here.”

But it was another avowed neo-Nazi from a different group, James Alex Fields Jr., who drove through a crowd of counterprotesters, killing 32-year-old Heather Heyer and injuring 35 others. Fields would eventually be convicted of murder and hate crime charges in Heyer’s killing.

Despite the violence, Schoep lauded those who participated in the rally on Twitter: “It was an Honor to stand with U all in C’Ville this weekend... true warriors!”

Two months later, a nonprofit group called Integrity First for America and a dozen of those injured sued Schoep and other alleged organizers of Unite the Right in federal civil court.

By the time Stern checked in with Schoep in 2018, the group was struggling with dwindling participation and mounting legal bills.

“Just man to man, I mean financially, we are in bad shape,” Schoep said in a call on Dec. 17, 2018, that lasted nearly an hour. “That’s the whole idea behind the Charlottesville lawsuit, to financially break the organization.”



Schoep relocated the National Socialist Movement from his home state of Minnesota to Detroit in 2007. (Ali Lapetina/for The Washington Post)

In sporadic phone calls since the race summit, Stern had tried — unsuccessfully — to steer Schoep away from his Nazi ideology. Now he sensed a new opportunity.

“It’s really time that you organize a new organization,” Stern said. “Hear me out very clearly.”

Schoep needed to trade the National Socialist Movement for a venture that could serve as the white man’s NAACP, Stern suggested. No swastikas. No Hitler. No hate. Schoep was primed for such a job in Trump’s America, Stern said, but only if he could shed the financial burden of the lawsuit.

This new organization, Stern said, could be the ideal bargaining chip. The Integrity First lawyers would be so pleased by Schoep’s change of heart, they would drop him from the lawsuit.

They would get to say they took down the National Socialist Movement, Stern hypothesized. Schoep would get to move on with his life.

“I feel that you can do better,” Stern told Schoep. “This is just one friend. Forget about race, not a black man, a friend. I call myself a friend of yours. And I stand by that. I don’t care what anybody says.”

The men were growing older, Stern said, and running out of time to leave their legacies.

He had sobering news of his own.

“I got cancer,” Stern said.

Days earlier, he had been diagnosed with a bladder tumor that he hoped surgeons could remove.

Stern tells Schoep he has cancer on Dec. 17, 2018

Warning: This clip contains explicit language.



Listen to their conversation and read the text

“Oh my gosh,” Schoep said, listening as Stern turned this information into an argument for walking away from the National Socialist Movement.

“Listen to me, Jeff,” Stern said. “I can get you out of this lawsuit. Really, I can.”

Schoep seemed open.

“If that’s on the table,” he said. “I’m willing to discuss.”



Left: Stern received chemotherapy through a chest port to treat his bladder cancer. (Philip Cheung/For The Washington Post) **Right:** Stern’s bedroom often doubled as his office during his treatment. (Philip Cheung/For The Washington Post)

‘You’ll find some skeletons’

For the next two months, they spoke on the phone nearly once a week, lengthy conversations that spanned the new year and the government shutdown, the five-year anniversary of the race summit where they met and Stern’s chemotherapy treatments.

The cancer was far more serious than Stern had initially believed.

Schoep listened as Stern talked about the way chemo made everything taste metallic. Schoep said his own mother had experienced the same thing before she lost her battle with breast cancer. He told Stern to rest and eat lots of broccolini. “Take care of yourself,” Schoep said, “or that cancer is going to spread.”

Schoep confided the doubts he’d started feeling about the National Socialist Movement. For a while, he told Stern, he had felt “stuck,” as if the organization was an “albatross” in his life. “It’s not good for me,” Schoep said. “It’s affecting my health.”

Stern challenges Schoep’s anti-Semitism on Jan. 23, 2019



Listen to their conversation and read the text

He felt indebted to Stern, he said, for giving him a way out.

“I know you’re sticking your neck out, James, and it means more to me than I could put in words,” Schoep said. “I really do appreciate it. You’re a true friend.”

Stern got Schoep’s permission to make contact with the lawyers representing the Charlottesville victims as a neutral third party. The conversation was tense, Stern reported back on Dec. 30, 2018, but productive. He said the lawyers were impressed that a black man would take over a neo-Nazi group but were leery of committing to a deal.

“So what we’ll do is, I says, ‘We’ll make the first move. We’ll fire the first bullet,’” Stern recounted to Schoep. “I says, ‘We’ll do the paperwork. We’ll do the things to show you we’re sincere.’”

Stern instructed Schoep to go to the Michigan secretary of state’s office and list “James Hart Stern” as CEO, secretary and treasurer of the National Socialist Movement. In a call on Jan. 6, Schoep asked Stern to promise their deal was “legitimate.”

“It would be different if I was a person trying to take something from you,” Stern said. “But I’m not.”

So Schoep authorized the first changes in mid-January.

But the victims’ lawyers wanted an extra layer of insulation, Stern said during three separate conversations on Jan. 23 and Jan. 24, clear proof that it was Schoep who made the changes and why. Stern asked Schoep to sign a sworn affidavit assuring he had authorized the move — another document for their paper trail, Stern said, to satisfy one of the attorneys.

Schoep hesitated.

What if he signed them over and then Stern didn’t keep his word? “Don’t take this personal,” Schoep said.

“There’s nothing personal to it,” Stern said. “You have to be the devil’s advocate. ‘What if Stern f---ed me?’”

“Exactly,” Schoep said.

Schoep questions Stern’s plan on Jan. 24, 2019

Warning: This clip contains explicit language.



Listen to their conversation and read the text

He told Stern he was worried that handing over the organization and the website, from which he derived all his income, would leave him unable to pay his legal bills if their deal fell through.

“It goes back,” Stern said, “to how do you feel about the person that you’re putting your future hand in?”

Schoep raised another uncomfortable question.

Stern had produced emails from a lawyer he claimed was involved with the Charlottesville lawsuit, but when Schoep investigated the domain name he discovered it belonged to Stern — not a law firm.

“Don’t let somebody show you every little method that I do things,” Stern snapped back. “Because a lot of little methods I do things is not straight across the board. Okay?”

In a “real world,” Stern said, “you’re not getting nothing done that way.”

“I understand that,” Schoep said, retreating.

“You’ll find some skeletons in how I’m getting things done,” Stern said. “But at the end of the day, it’s about getting it done.”

Stern snaps at Schoep on Jan. 24, 2019



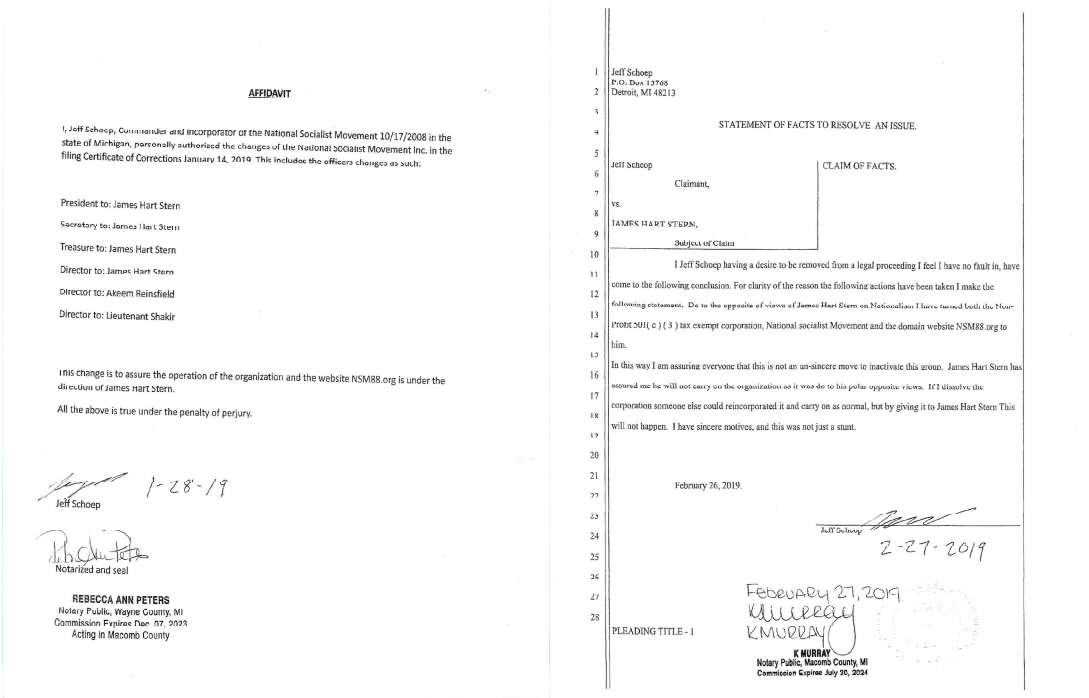
Listen to their conversation and read the text

On Jan. 28, Schoep signed the affidavit. On Feb. 27, after firing his attorneys at Stern’s urging, he signed the statement of facts.

Days later, on March 1, both men joined a conference call with the judge and the victims’ lawyers.

Schoep was convinced he would soon be free of the lawsuit. But as the lawyers started talking, and the judge started asking questions, and Stern started speaking as president of

the National Socialist Movement with a detached and calculated coolness, Schoep realized his friend was not delivering what he had promised.



Click to enlarge. Schoep signed a statement of facts on Feb. 27, 2019. (Obtained by The Washington Post)

Nobody mentioned dismissing the lawsuit. Nobody talked about the fresh start he wanted.

Instead, Stern — now in charge — agreed to hand over the National Socialist Movement’s data. He asked the judge to find the National Socialist Movement liable for the violence at Unite the Right and told the victims’ lawyers he would help expedite discovery.

He asked the judge to ensure Schoep had no power to interfere.

“I want to make sure that he has no legal standing, no binding ties with the organization anymore,” Stern told the judge. “Period.”

Within hours of the conference call, Stern was giving interviews to reporters. He called himself the “race whisperer” and declared grand plans to stream the Holocaust movie “Schindler’s List” on the hate group’s website.



Stern was fighting cancer throughout 2019, but he kept working. (Philip Cheung/For The Washington Post)

“I did the hard and dangerous part,” Stern told The Washington Post at the time. “As a black man, I took over a neo-Nazi group and outsmarted them.”

In Schoep’s world, the fallout was swift, as outraged members realized their personal information might fall into the hands of a black man.

Schoep insisted in a lengthy email to them that he had been “fraudulently manipulated.”

“I would never purposefully damage the organization I have spent so many years serving,” Schoep wrote. “I want to thank everyone who has stood by us during this difficult time. You are giants among lesser men and your loyalty will be remembered. As for all of the vultures, snakes, and international banking and media interests who have attempted to damage NSM and me personally, you have shown your true colors.”

He resigned, then retreated.

Later, an Integrity First spokeswoman would tell The Post the legal team had taken one call from Stern but ignored his advances. She said the group never agreed to dismiss the lawsuit or remove Schoep as a defendant.

Stern reveled in the wave of publicity that followed the takeover. When asked who “won the week,” a panelist on MSNBC’s “A.M. Joy” named him. Filmmaker Ava DuVernay tweeted about his “wild” tale. Strangers called him a hero and compared him to the Colorado undercover detective depicted in Spike Lee’s “BlacKkKlansman.” Movie producers clamored for his life rights.

He had signed a contract with Mark Wahlberg’s production studio for a documentary film, and already a camera crew was following him around.

They were eager to witness what came next.



Stern prays with the board of directors he appointed to help him take over the National Socialist Movement during a meeting in Burbank, Calif. (Philip Cheung/For The Washington Post)

A conversion and a funeral

Less than a week after Stern declared victory over the National Socialist Movement, members shoved him aside by replacing his name on the incorporation paperwork with their own.

It set off a legal war that occupied Stern for months — through his decision to halt chemotherapy, an emergency surgery that saved his life and the hospice care needed to ease the end of it.

The Charlottesville judge barred Stern from participating in the lawsuit in April, but he kept fighting, recruiting his own board of directors and suing Schoep and his officers, including the newly appointed commander, Burt Colucci, over his allegations that they stole the National Socialist Movement from him. On the same May day that Stern tried to move the corporation to California, Colucci incorporated it in his home state of Florida. In June, he dissolved the original National Socialist Movement in Michigan.

“Boo-ya nigga,” Colucci taunted on social media.

That same month, Colucci led a dozen armed members to Detroit to protest Michigan’s Pride celebration. They returned the swastika to their uniforms, tore a rainbow flag, pushed a woman to the ground and made monkey noises at black people, according to news reports.

They were in Schoep’s hometown, but he did not attend. Still facing the lawsuit, Schoep was quietly working to separate himself from the world he’d inhabited for more than 25 years.



Schoep says he has been disowned by the people he considered family in the National Socialist Movement. (Ali Lapetina/for The Washington Post)

On Aug. 12 — the two-year anniversary of Charlottesville — Schoep resurfaced with an announcement: The lifelong neo-Nazi had renounced white supremacy.

“I realized many of the principles I had once held so dearly and sacrificed so much for were wrong,” Schoep wrote on his website. “After wrestling with my conscience, over how to best set things right, I realized that I cannot just sit back while the world continues to burn in the flames of hatred. Instead of remaining silent, I have decided to speak out and help others. It is now my mission to be a positive, peaceful influence of change and understanding for all of humanity in these uncertain times.”

He joined [Parallel Networks](#), a group that fights extremism.

Although they hadn’t talked in months, Stern cried when he learned what Schoep had done.

“I’ve always tried to get him to denounce such an evil,” Stern said. “I always knew it was in him to do that.”

Stern wanted to call Schoep. He wasn’t sure, though, how to get his former friend to answer the phone. He decided to hold off — until the documentary film crew could record their conversation.

But Stern’s health rapidly deteriorated, and the two men never talked. On Oct. 11, Stern died at his home.

Ten days later, Schoep delivered his first public speech at a European Union summit on extremism. He titled it “American Nazi: Radical to Redemption.”

Schoep described the best ways of pulling people out of hate groups, and how the most persuasive advocates used friendship, empathy and compassion to reach him.

He never mentioned James Stern.

Correction: An earlier version of this story said Schoep relied on the National Socialist Movement's dues to help pay his bills. He says he relied only on merchandise sales.



Katie Mettler

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About this story

Editing by Lynda Robinson. Photo editing by Mark Miller. Copy editing by Todd Kistler. Video editing by [Allie Caren](#). Audio editing by [Maggie Penman](#) and [Ted Muldoon](#). Design and development by [Junne Alcantara](#).



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They covered their school in racist graffiti. They apologized. But will they change?

A black principal, four white teens, and the ‘senior prank’ that became a hate crime.



In the Army and the Klan, he hated Muslims. Now one was coming to his home.


Chris Buckley, who served in Iraq and Afghanistan before joining the KKK, despised Muslims and other minorities. Then a Muslim doctor tried to help him change.




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